ISLĀMIC HIJĀB FOR WOMEN

WRITTEN BY SALEEM BHIMJI & ARIFA HUDDA

Islāmic Ḥijāb in the Light of the Qur'ān

وَقُل لِّلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَ
لاَ يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلاَّ مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَى
جُيُوبِهِنَّ وَلاَ يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلاَّ لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَاء
بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَائِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاء بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي
إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي أَخَوَاتِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ
أَوِ التَّابِعِينَ غَيْرِ أُوْلِي الْأِرْبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوِ الطِّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ
يَظْهَرُوا عَلَى عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاء وَلاَ يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا
يُخْفِينَ مِن زِينَتِهِنَّ وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

"And say to the believing women that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts and do not display their ornaments except what appears thereof, and let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms, and not display their ornaments except to their husbands or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or those whom their right hands possess, or the male servants not having need (of women), or the children who have not attained knowledge of what is hidden of women; and let them not strike their feet so that what they hide of their ornaments may be known; and turn to Allah all of you, O believers! so that you may be successful." (Sūrah an-Nūr (24) Verse 31)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُل لِّأَزْوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاء الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ
عَلَيْهِنَّ مِن جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَى أَن يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ وَكَانَ
اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا ﴿٥٩﴾

"O' Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters, and the women of the believers that they let down upon themselves their over-garments; this will be more proper, that they may be known, and thus they will not be given trouble; and Allāh is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful." (Sūrah al-Aḥzāb (33), Verse 59)

To begin with since this verse contains certain words which have a deep, specific meaning in Arabic, we wish to clarify them in a few sentences:

1. The word "*JILBĀB (جلباب)* has been used in this verse as an over-garment. From aḥādīth and tafsīr of this verse, it is clear that the *jilbāb* is actually a large piece of cloth, or a covering that is worn above the actual scarf on the head that covers the entire head (as a second layer) and neck, and the entire form and figure of the woman is covered by it too.

Another definition of *JILBĀB* which is mentioned in the dictionaries of Qur'ānic terminology is the *Maqnah* or scarf that a Muslim woman wears to cover her hair and her neck.

When we refer to *al-Mizān fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by the late *'Allāmah Ṭabā'ṭabā'ī* (may Allāh raise his rank), he mentions the definition of *jilbāb* [whose plural form is *jalābīb (جلابيب)]* to be any type of covering that covers the woman from the top of her head down to her feet. He says that it can also refer to a scarf that would cover the entire head and neck of a woman.

2. Another word needing clarification is *UDNĪNA (يدنين)* which literally means to bring close, and in this case Allāh is commanding the women to bring close their *jilbāb* to their bodies. The meaning of this is that it should not be kept open for free flowing such that the show or shape of the body could become apparent for example if the wind blows, etc…

From the second verse, it is perfectly clear that the commandment or common use of a form of Ḥijāb was present in the Muslim society at that time, and this verse simply added an extra emphasis as to the proper method that Allāh wanted the women to observe.

As we know, many of the rules of Islām were put into place by previous Prophets – an example of this is the *ḥajj* and its rites. The *Ṭawāf* around the *Ka'bah* was done by Adam, Nūh, Ibrahīm and others, and with the coming of Islām, it was maintained but with an 'update' or clarification as to the particular method Allāh wanted us to perform this act of worship.

The Ḥijāb too falls into this category such that it was common for those of the Arabian peninsula before the advent of *al-Islām*, and with the coming of the final Prophet of Allāh, it was brought to its completion and perfection, thus making the Muslim sister who observes this commandment in the way it should, the most complete and perfect woman to walk on this Earth – Glory be to Allāh for His guidance!

The final point about this verse which in reality summarizes the beauty and greatness and magnificence of Allāh in a few words is by Him saying, *"God is All-Forgiving and All-Merciful."* By Him closing this verse with these words of delight, He is telling the Muslim woman that if one of you did not wear the Ḥijāb in the way that He has prescribed it to be worn out of ignorance or not knowing the correct

procedure or rules, then ultimately ask for forgiveness, Surely He is the All-Forgiving and All-Merciful!

Of course, in order to be forgiven, the Muslim sister must not repeat her sin as now she has become aware of her responsibility to Allāh. She must turn back towards Allāh, repent, promise to never repeat what she has done in the past, and wear the Ḥijāb as it is to be worn.

The Ḥijāb, just as Allāh mentions in this verse, is also one sign of a woman being a Muslim. At the time of the Prophet of Islām, and even today where we are surrounded by the *Kuffār*, we see that the majority of the women walk around half naked or worse, and all of them do not cover their bodies or hair.

The time that the Final Prophet lived, 1400 years ago was one where Jews, Christians, Atheists and even slaves existed but they did not cover their bodies. These women would have to bear the flirting and sexual advances of men and it was clear to the general public that these women were not Muslims. Allāh made the Ḥijāb a sign of one's religion. This would tell the men in the society that these women are Muslimahs and demand respect and that they are not there to please their sexual instincts.

In today's society especially in North America where we are living, the condition at the time of the Prophet and that of ours is similar. For a Muslim woman to wear the proper Ḥijāb in this environment also serves as a shield and a protection. It also lets others know that she is a *Muslimah* and is proud of her religion and its commandments. In a society were rapes are occurring every second, we rarely hear of Muslim women who are wearing the complete and proper Ḥijāb facing this humiliating and evil act. With a million naked women to look at, the *Kuffar* men have no need to look at a *Muslimah* covered from head to toe in simple attire. It is for this reason too, it can be said that *Ḥijāb is a protection not a limitation.*

Another point which must be mentioned in regards to the Islāmic Ḥijāb (which is applicable for both men and women) is that in reality, there are four levels or stages of Ḥijāb in Islām. At least the first three of these can be summed up from one verse of the holy Qur'ān where Allāh (SWT) says:

يَا بَنِي آدَمَ قَدْ أَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ لِبَاسًا يُوَارِي سَوْءَاتِكُمْ وَرِيشًا
وَلِبَاسُ التَّقْوَى ذَالِكَ خَيْرٌ ذَلِكَ مِنْ آيَاتِ اللّهِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُونَ
﴿٢٦﴾

"O' children of Ādam! We have indeed sent down to you clothing to cover your shame, and (clothing) for beauty - and (verily) the clothing that guards (against evil) that is the best. This is from the communications of Allāh that they may be mindful." (Holy Qur'ān, Verse 7:26)

Among the four levels of Ḥijāb that are mentioned in the Islāmic teachings, the first one is the Ḥijāb of the heart. This is the level where both the man and woman do not entertain thoughts about looking at the opposite sex – even if they are in their presence. Our love and fear of Allāh (SWT) too should be so great that we keep away from all evils and sins. As long as a person does this and in essence, strives to reach towards perfection and strives to reach towards Allāh (SWT), he and she will be able to maintain the Ḥijāb of the heart.

The second level is the Ḥijāb of the eyes. In this stage or level, both the man and woman lower their eyes while in the presence of members of the opposite sex – Muslim or non-Muslim. In a well-known ḥadīth from the Prophet of Islām, he had said that the first look is for you and the second look is against you. By this, he meant that when you see a non-Maḥram man or woman, the first glance is permitted and you will not be questioned or punished about this, but the second look is the one which will be held against you and you will be punished for it because more than often, this second look is associated with some kind of bad thought or looking due to the beauty of the person.

Regarding the Ḥijāb of the eyes, the Qur'ān mentions:

قُل لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَلِكَ
أَزْكَى لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾ وَقُل لِّلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ
يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ... ﴿٣١﴾

"Say to the believing men that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts; that is purer for them; surely Allah is Aware of what they do. And say to the believing women that they cast down their looks…" (Qur'ān, Sūrah 24:30-31)

The third Ḥijāb is that of intermingling between members of the opposite sex who are non-Maḥram with each other. In Islām AS LONG AS all the other three conditions have been met, it is permitted. This means that the men and women in the gathering must have the Ḥijāb of the heart; must possess that level of *taqwa* (piety) to keep themselves away from looking at the opposite sex; and all the participants must observe the Ḥijāb of the eyes – there can be no 'looking' at the opposite sex; and in addition to these things, the men and women must both be observing the correct Islāmic Ḥijāb in such a gathering which means the women must be covered from head to toe in the proper Ḥijāb.

The women are not permitted to wear anything that would be classified as beautification, which would include makeup, jewelry that could be seen, etc… The men too would have to observe modest dress and wearing short sleeve shirts, exposing the chest, etc… would not be permitted.

Practically, in our lives, we see that it is difficult to ensure that all the people in a gathering would observe all these levels, and thus keeping this in mind, it is not permitted to

engage in mixed gatherings and parites where everyone is observing the Ḥijāb correctly.

These three 'coverings' are in actuality all based on *taqwa* or 'God-Consciousness' that has been repeated hundreds of times in the Qur'ān. Thus, it is possible for a Muslim brother or sister to be maintaining the 'physical' Ḥijāb such as covering the body, hair and other beauties, but not possessing the *taqwa* – thus, they may be dressed appropriately, but their demeanor or behavior around non-Maḥram men or women is less than would it should be. It is just like following a tradition of wearing a scarf without understanding and that is why we see people indulging in sin because their Ḥijāb is only physical, and although they will be rewarded for this, however, they have not fulfilled the spiritual Ḥijāb aspect, which is the true essence of the Ḥijāb.

For one who wants to know what *taqwa* actually is, and the signs of one who is a *muttaqī* (one possessing *taqwa)*, one can look into the verses of the Qur'ān and the aḥādīth, especially the works of Imām 'Alī ibn 'Abī Ṭālib, peace be upon him, in Nahj al-Balāgha, where he describes the *muttaqī* in such vivid detail that it is almost as if one is looking at a *muttaqī.*

The fourth and final level of Ḥijāb is that of the actual clothing. Although this applies to even for men to a certain extent, we will point out the women's responsibility in this section. Women are commanded to observe a particular type of covering and it is not enough to simply 'dress modestly', and feel that this is the Islāmic Ḥijāb.

Two verses from the holy Qur'ān were quoted in the introduction, and it has been reported from our various 'Ulamā' that in actuality, there are over 20 verses of the Qur'ān in relation to the Ḥijāb! In addition to this, we have hundreds of aḥādīth from the Prophet and his divinely chosen successors regarding the necessity for a Muslim woman to wear the Ḥijāb, its minimum requirements, etc…

Islāmic Hijāb in the Light of the Aḥādīth

1. In a lengthy narration from 'Alī ibn Ibrahīm in his tafsīr of the Qur'ān, narrating from Abū Ja'far (Imām Muḥammad Bāqir, peace be upon him) it has been stated that:

عن أبي جعفر عليه السلام في قوله ((و لا يبدين زينتهن إلا ما ظهر منها)) فهي الثياب و الكحل و الخاتم و خضاب الكف و السوار و الزينة ثلاث زينة للناس و زينة للمحرم و زينة للزوج فأما زينة الناس فقد ذكرناه و أما زينة المحرم فموضع القلادة فما فوقها و الدملج و ما دونه و الخلخل و ما أسفل منه و أما زينة الزوج فالجسد كله.

"In regards to the verse, '***And they do not display their beauties…***', the Imām said that the apparent beauties include the woman's clothes, Surmah (a type of powder applied on the inner eye-lid – usually in the Middle Eastern countries), rings, and bracelets. He then said that beauties are of three types: one of them is related to all people which is the one that we just mentioned; the second being the beauties for one's Maḥārim and these include the neck and all above that part, the waist and that below it (this can be kept open while in the presence of one's Maḥārim); and the third beauty which is related to one's spouse which includes the entire body of the woman."[1]

عن أبي عبد الله ع قال قلت له ما يحل للرجل أن يرى من المرأة إذا لم يكن محرما قال الوجه و الكفان و القدمان.

2. In another ḥadīth from Abī 'Abdillāh Ja'far ibn Muḥammad as-Ṣādiq (peace be upon him) it has been mentioned that a person once asked him what parts of the body were permitted for a man to look at of a woman who is his non-Maḥram? The Imām replied the face, the two palms of the hands, and the souls of the feet.[2]

That which has been made an exception is the palms of the hand and the face, as long as they are looked at without a sexual intention. Rather, in the books of the Fuqahā it has been mentioned that it is ḥarām to look at the face and hands of a woman with a sexual intention. Infact, according to Iḥtiyāt Wājib even if one does not have a sexual intention, he still must not look at these parts. The feet too, according to the Marāja must be covered. Also a woman is only permitted to look at those parts of the body of a man that are commonly exposed by them.

3. Asmā' (the daughter of Abū Bakr, and the sister of 'Āyesha) once came to the house of our Prophet while she was wearing thin, see-thru clothing that was showing her body. The Prophet of Islām turned his face away from her (so as not to look at her) and told her, 'O' Asmā'! Verily when a woman reaches to the age of maturity, it is not appropriate that one sees her body except for this and this of her (he said this by pointing with his own hands) and he pointed to the palms of his hands and the face.[3]

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[1] Mustadrak al-Wasā'il (old print), Verse 2, Page 555 & Biḥār al-Anwār, Volume 67, Page 101

[2] Usūl al-Kāfī, Volume 5, Page 521

[3] Sunān Abī Dawud, Volume 4, Page 62

عَنِ الْفُضَيْلِ بْنِ يَسَارٍ قَالَ سَأَلْتُ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عليه السلام عَنِ الذِّرَاعَيْنِ مِنَ الْمَرْأَةِ أَ هُمَا مِنَ الزِّينَةِ الَّتِي قَالَ اللَّهُ تَبَارَكَ وَ تَعَالَى وَ لا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ قَالَ نَعَمْ وَ مَا دُونَ الْخِمَارِ مِنَ الزِّينَةِ وَ مَا دُونَ السِّوَارَيْنِ.

4. In another narration from Fuḍhaīl ibn Yasār, he mentions that once he asked Abā 'Abdillāh, Ja'far ibn Muḥammad as-Ṣādiq (peace be upon him) if the elbow up to the wrist of the woman would be classified as a beauty (so as to be covered in the presence of non-Maḥram men); since Allāh had mentioned in the Qur'ān that the women must not display their beauties except to their close relatives. The Imām replied yes that this was considered as a beauty, and that which was under their scarf (hair and neck) and from their bracelet and above must all be covered.[4]

يَا حَوْلَاءُ لَا تُبْدِي زِينَتَكِ لِغَيْرِ زَوْجِكِ يَا حَوْلَاءُ لَا يَحِلُّ لِامْرَأَةٍ أَنْ تُظْهِرَ مِعْصَمَهَا وَ قَدَمَهَا لِرَجُلٍ غَيْرِ بَعْلِهَا وَ إِذَا فَعَلَتْ ذَلِكَ لَمْ تَزَلْ فِي لَعْنَةِ اللَّهِ وَ سَخَطِهِ وَ غَضِبَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهَا وَ لَعَنَتْهَا مَلَائِكَةُ اللَّهِ وَ أَعَدَّ لَهَا عَذَاباً أَلِيماً.

5. The Prophet of Allāh Muḥammad (peace be upon him and his family), addressing Ḥawlā', the wife of 'Aṭārah said, "O' Ḥawlā'! Do not display your beauties to other than your husband! O' Ḥawlā'! It is not permitted for a woman to show her arm and her feet to non-Maḥram men and if she continues to do this, Allāh (SWT) will continue to curse her; she will fall victim to the anger and wrath of Allāh (SWT), and the Angels of Allāh will also curse her; and a very frightful punishment will await her on the Day of Judgement!"[5]

يَا حَوْلَاءُ مَنْ كَانَتْ مِنْكُنَّ تُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَ الْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ لَا تَجْعَلُ زِينَتَهَا لِغَيْرِ زَوْجِهَا وَ لَا تُبْدِي خِمَارَهَا وَ مِعْصَمَهَا وَ أَيُّمَا امْرَأَةٍ جَعَلَتْ شَيْئاً مِنْ ذَلِكَ لِغَيْرِ زَوْجِهَا فَقَدْ أَفْسَدَتْ دِينَهَا وَ أَسْخَطَتْ رَبَّهَا عَلَيْهَا

Continuing his speech to Ḥawlā', the Prophet said, "O' Ḥawlā'! Whichever woman amongst you has firm belief in Allāh and the Last Day will not permit her beauties to be seen by other than her husband, and she will not allow the hair of her head and her arms to be shown. Any woman who allows these to be seen to other than her husband has undoubtedly corrupted her religion (her faith), and has made her Lord upset with her."[6]

In the final ḥadīth on this topic, Imām Ja'far as-Ṣādiq (peace be upon him) said, that it is not permitted for a Muslim woman to wear a scarf (to cover the hair) or a shirt and leave the rest of her body open (uncovered).[7]

From the verses of the Qur'ān and the aḥādīth we have presented, one general rule can be deduced that the Muslim woman must cover her entire body and hair from the view of non-Maḥram men. Not only this, but through her acts, speech, clothing and her general demeanor, she must not do anything to draw the attention of non-Maḥram men.

From the narration of Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir (peace be upon him) regarding the tafsīr of the verse (the first verse mentioned), we can deduce that a woman's Maḥram which include her brother, father, etc… do not have the right to look at every part of her body and the woman too must not keep that which is below her neck and that which is above the waist area her private parts to be left open. It is not permitted for a woman that just because she is amongst her Maḥārim, she wears whatever she wishes or decorates and beautifies herself in any way she pleases.

Philosophy for the Ḥijāb in the Words of 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā peace be upon him)

اَلرِّضَا عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ كتب فِيْمَا كتب مِنْ جَوَابِ مَسَائِلِهِ حَرُمَ النَّظَرِ إِلَى شُعُورِ النِّسَاءِ الْمَحْجُوبَاتِ بِالأَزْوَاجِ وَ غَيْرَهُنَّ مِنَ النسَاءِ لما فِيهِ مِنْ تَهْيِيجِ الرِّجَالُ وَ مَا يَدْعُو التَهْيِيجَ إِلَى الْفَسَادِ وَ الدُّخُولَ فِيمَا لاَ يَحِلُّ وَ لاَ يَحْمِلُ وَ كَذَالِكَ مَا أَشْبَهَ الشُّعُور.

A person once asked the 8th Imām the reason for the Ḥijāb in Islām, to which our leader replied: "The reason why looking at the hair of a woman has been made forbidden is that if the her hair was kept open in the presence of non-Maḥram men, this would lead to sexual excitement and to cause him to become attracted to her and this (becoming attracted) could lead to corruption (between the man and woman) and this would lead to the man falling into that which is forbidden (ḥarām)."[8]

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[4] Usūl al-Kāfī, Volume 5, Page 521

[5] Mustadarak al-Wasā'il, Volume 2, Page 549 (Old print), or Volume 14, Page 242 of the new print

[6] Ibid.

[7] Wasā'īl ash-Shī'a, Volume 3, Page 28

[8] 'Ilul ash-Sharā'ih, Volume 2, Page 287, Section 364

The Best Woman in the Sight of Fāṭimah az-Zahrā (peace be upon her)

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم في الحديث الـذي قالته فاطمة عليها السلام خير النساء أن لا يرين الرجال و لا يراهن الرجال فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم إنها مني.

The Leader of the Women of Paradise, Fāṭimah az-Zahrā (peace be upon her) said: "The best woman is she who no men see and she does not see any men." Upon hearing these words, the Prophet of Allāh Muḥammad (peace be upon him and his family) replied, "Verily she (Fāṭimah) is from me!"[9]

By the Prophet adding this final sentence of a few words, his aim was to convey to the Muslim Ummah that whatever Fāṭimah az-Zahrā says or does is in actuality the words and deeds of the Prophet, which are in turn, the words and commandments of Allāh (SWT).

عَنْ عَلِيٍّ عليه السلام أَنَّهُ قَالَ قَالَ لَنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صلـى الله عليه وآله وسلّم أَيُّ شَيْءٍ خَيْرٌ لِلْمَرْأَةِ فَلَمْ يُجِبْهُ أَحَـدٌ مِنَّـا فَذَكَرْتُ ذَلِكَ لِفَاطِمَةَ عليها السلام فَقَالَتْ مَا مِنْ شَيْءٍ خَـيْرٌ لِلْمَرْأَةِ مِنْ أَنْ لَا تَرَى رَجُلًا وَ لَا يَرَاهَا فَذَكَرْتُ ذَلِكَ لِرَسُـولِ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وآله وسلّم فَقَالَ صَدَقَتْ إِنَّهَا بَضْعَةٌ مِنِّي.

In another narration from the Commander of the Faithful 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (peace be upon him), it is narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) once asked us, "What is the best thing for a woman?" No one in the gathering answered him.

This same question was then posed to Fāṭimah az-Zahra (peace be upon her). She replied, "The best thing for a woman is that she does not see any man and no man sees her."

'Alī then went to the Prophet (in that gathering of other companions) and told him the answer that Fāṭimah (peace be upon her), had given to which the Prophet replied, "She has spoken the truth! Verily she is a part of me!"[10]

[9] Makārim al-Akhlāq, Page 233

[10] Mustadrak al-Wasā'īl, Volume 2, Page 558 (old print) or Volume 14, Page 289 (new print)

A Lesson in the Life and Death of Fāṭimah az-Zahrā (peace be upon her)

عَنْ أَسْمَاءَ بِنْتِ عُمَيْسٍ أَنَّ فَاطِمَةَ عليها السلام قَالَتْ لَـهَا إِنِّي قَدِ اسْتَقْبَحْتُ مَا يُصْنَعُ بِالنِّسَاءِ إِنَّهُ يُطْرَحُ عَلَى الْمَـرْأَةِ الثَّوْبُ فَيَصِفُهَا لِمَنْ رَأَى فَقُلْتُ يَا بِنْتَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أَنَا أَصْنَـعُ لَكِ شَيْئاً رَأَيْتُهُ بِأَرْضِ الْحَبَشَةِ قَالَتْ فَدَعَوْتُ بِجَرِيدَةٍ رَطْبَـةٍ فَحَبَسْتُهَا ثُمَّ طَرَحْتُ عَلَيْهَا ثَوْباً فَقَالَتْ فَاطِمَةُ مَا أَحْسَنَ هَـذَا وَ أَجْمَلَهُ لَا تُعْرَفُ بِهِ الْمَرْأَةُ مِنَ الرَّجُلِ فَإِذَا مِتُّ فَاغْسِـلِينِي أَنْتِ إِلَى أَنْ قَالَ فَلَمَّا مَاتَتْ عليها السلام غَسَّـلَهَا عَلِـيٌّ وَ أَسْمَاءُ.

Asmā' bint 'Umays has narrated, "One day Fāṭimah az-Zahrā said to me, 'Upon the death of a woman, I do not like the way the people of Madinah simply place a cloth over top of the woman's body such that the shape and form of her body is visible.' I told her, 'While in Ḥabasha (Ethiopia) I saw a thing that they used to carry the deceased in.'

After saying this, 'Asmā' went out and brought some branches of a date tree and constructed a 'casket'. She then told Fāṭimah az-Zahrā that the people of Ethiopia used to make something such as this out of wood and then would place a cloth over top of it and the body would be placed inside. In this way, the shape or figure of the woman would not be seen.'

When the Leader of the Women of Paradise saw this, she said, 'This is very good and when I leave this world, place my body in this!'"

In relation to this, Imām Ja'far as-Ṣādiq (peace be upon him) had said: "The first person to be placed inside a coffin was Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad (peace be upon her and her father)."[11]

Ibn 'Abbās has related that: "When Fāṭimah az-Zahrā (peace be upon her) due to her grief and injuries fell sick, she told 'Asmā', 'Do not carry my body in such a way that my shape or figure is made apparent.'

'Asmā' bint 'Umaīs constructed a coffin from the date tree for her, and this turned out to be the first coffin used in Islām. When Fāṭimah az-Zahrā saw the coffin it is said that she smiled and this was the first time she had smiled since the death of her noble father and up until that day, no one had seen her so happy. Following this, her body was carried in

[11] Wasā'īl ash-Shī'a, Volume 2, Page 876

the coffin at night so as to be buried out of the view of the others."[12]

The Voice of Justice : Zainab bint Amīr al-Mo'minīn 'Ali (peace be upon both of them) in Syria

After the tragedy that befell the family of the Prophet in Kerbala, the captives were dragged from Iraq to present day Syria without their coverings. After some days, they were brought into the grand palace of the despot Yazid (may Allāh's never ending curse be upon him, his helpers and friends) in Syria.

The leader of the women in this caravan, the powerful orator and outspoken woman, Zainab, the daughter of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (peace be upon both of them), stood in the presence of the epitome of disbelief, transgression and corruption, and gave the following speech:

أَمِنَ الْعَدْلِ يَا ابْنَ الطُّلَقَاءِ تَخْدِيـــرُكَ حَرَائِـــرَكَ وَ إِمَـــائَكَ وَ سَوْقُكَ بَنَاتِ رَسُولِ اللهِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ سَـــبَايَا؟؟ قَدْ هَتَكْتَ سُتُورَهُنَّ وَ أَبْدَيتَ وُجُوهَهُنَّپس تَحَـــــدُوا بِـــهِنَّ الأَعْدَاءِ مِنْ بَلَدٍ إِلَى بَلَدٍ وَ يَسْتَشْرُفُهُنَّ أَهْلَ الْمَنَاهِلِ وَ الْمَنَافِلِ وَ يَتَصَفَّحُ وُجُوهَهُنَّ الْقَرِيبُ وَ الْبَعِيدُ...

"Is this justice, O' son of the one whose parents were slaves and then freed by my grandfather (the Prophet of Islām) that your women and slave girls are kept hidden behind curtains and in a respectable place, but the daughters of the Prophet of Allāh (peace be upon him and his family) are kept as captives and transported from here to there, whose coverings and clothing have been taken away from them, and whose faces have been kept bare and exposed (to others)?

They are moved from city to city and displayed in front of the enemies, and foreigners and locals are given a chance to see them?"[13]

In this and other powerful speeches of this great lady, we see that she did not complain about their long walking or travels nor about the heat or cold, nor about the food and provisions they were or were not given to them – rather much more important than all of this was the fact that their Ḥijāb was removed and they were paraded through the streets, towns and villages with their hair and face open! The non-Maḥram men were able to see their complete appearance and beauties – something which the Qur'ān has commanded to be covered!

Those of us who mourn the tragedies of what happened to Imām Ḥusayn (peace be upon him) and the tragedies that came upon the Ahl al-Baīt of the Prophet, and who cry non-stop during the year because of this oppression - especially during the days of Muḥarram and Safar, must constantly remember this episode and imagine how these women felt being robbed of their Ḥijāb! They were forced to parade around the city without the covering that Allāh has made Wājib upon every woman.

Unfortunately, in today's day and age, women "freely" and by their own decision decide to parade themselves through the malls, streets and bazaars of the city without the proper covering – something the Ahl al-Baīt (peace be upon them), fought so hard to put into place while Zaināb and the rest of the women were forced to walk around with their heads open, we do this willingly…

Another woman who was made to face the same sort of shame and embarrassment after the episode of Kerbalā was Umm al-Kulthūm, the other daughter of 'Alī and Fāṭimah (peace be upon both of them) who spoke the following upon entering the city of Shām in Syria:

لِي إِلَيْكَ حَاجَةٌ فَقَالَ (لعنت الله عليه) مَا حَاجَتُكَ؟ قَـــالَتْ (عَلَيْهَا السَّلَامُ) إِذَا دَخَلْتَ بِنَا الْبَلَدَ فَاحْمِلْنَا فِي دَرْبٍ قَلِيـــلِ النَّظَارَةِ وَ تُقَدِّمْ إِلَيْهِمْ أَنْ يُخْرِجُوا هِذِهِ الرُّؤُوسِ مِـــنِ بَيْـــنِ الْمَحَامِلِ وَ يُنَحُّونَا عَنْهَا فَقَدْ خَزِينَا مِنْ كَثْرَةِ النَّظَرِ إِلَيْنَـــا وَ نَحْنُ فِي هَذِهِ الْحَالِ.

"When you lead us into Shām, let us go through an entrance in which there are few people watching so that as few as possible (non-Maḥram) will look at us.

Take the heads of the martyrs out of where they are presently and place them at the front of our caravan such that the people will look at them and pay attention to the heads and thus, will not bother looking at us since having non-Maḥram men looking at us in this stage causes us much distress and pains us much."[14]

May Allāh (SWT) give us all the power and ability and certainty to follow His rules and regulations and be able to guide others to the Truth of al-Islām. May Allāh give us all the power to perform 'Amr bil Ma'rūf wa Nahī anil Munkar' – command others to what is right and prevent them from committing what is wrong.

والسلام من اتبع الهدى

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[12] Ibid.,

[13] Luhūf Sayyid ibn Ṭāwūs, Page 106 and Nafas al-Mahmūm, Page 444

[14] Nafas al-Mahmūm, Page 429